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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON
THE WORK OF THE ORGANIZATION

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Identical letters dated 10 December 1996 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly and to the President of the Security Council

I wish to refer to the High-level Consultation on Post-conflict Peace-building in West Africa: Political and Development Initiatives, held in New York on 21 October 1996 under my auspices, with the participation of representatives of the 16 members of the Economic Community of West African States as well as of 21 donor countries and five multilateral institutions. The Consultation was co-chaired by the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. It considered strategies for formulating and funding, in the specific West African context, programmes aimed at consolidating peace and promoting development in post-conflict situations.

The focused and consensual atmosphere of the Consultation allowed for an in-depth, action-oriented consideration of the issues under review. The purpose of the present letter is to bring to the attention of the members of the General Assembly and the Security Council, in advance of the detailed summary of the Consultation being prepared by UNDP, some of the findings, ideas and proposals discussed by the participants. It should be read in the context of the statement by the President of the Security Council of 22 February 1995 (S/PRST/1995/9), in which the Council urged States "to support the efforts of the United Nations system with regard to preventive and post-conflict peace-building activities and, in this context, to provide necessary assistance for the economic and social development of countries, especially those which have suffered or are suffering from conflicts".

A first finding was that, in West Africa, peace-building is indeed relevant to all phases of a conflict and should therefore not be limited to post-conflict situations only. Reference was made repeatedly to those "half-war half-peace situations", as a participant called them, where a country may experience a high level of insecurity and instability but not continuous, full-fledged hostilities. The point was made throughout the Consultation that the foundation on which peace is built must be laid before a conflict ends and that development should be an integral part of that foundation.

A second finding was that West African countries affected by war or in special situations need not only humanitarian relief but also assistance that will address as a matter of priority the security and political dimensions of development. Included in that assistance should be programmes aimed at disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants, demining, strengthening of civil society, confidence-building, enhancement of public security, reconciliation, strengthening of public institutions etc. In some cases, especially in the wake of a peacekeeping operation, the peace-building activities conducted by the United Nations system should be placed temporarily under the overall coordination of a special representative of the Secretary-General, with a mandate to focus those activities on the restoration and consolidation of peace and security.

Several obstacles to assistance of the type described above were identified. One was the current definition of official development assistance, which excludes programmes aimed primarily at the restoration of a safe and secure environment. Another related obstacle was the reluctance of donor countries to allocate development funds to countries characterized by a high level of insecurity. This reluctance led to situations such as those in Mali and Sierra Leone, where substantial development funds had been committed by the donor community but their delivery had been conditioned by some donors on the signing of a formal peace accord. The result was that urgently needed assistance that could have contributed to an early restoration of security and stability in those countries was unnecessarily delayed.

Two proposals were made to overcome these obstacles: (a) to include programmes aimed primarily at the restoration of a safe and secure environment in the official definition of development assistance; and (b) to establish a peace fund to finance programmes that promote the security needed for development and humanitarian relief. I have asked the Co-Chairmen of the Consultation to examine and report to me on the possible design and terms of reference of such a funding mechanism.

A third finding of the Consultation was that the proliferation of small arms poses a threat to the security and development of West Africa as a whole and not only individual countries. The two missions which I sent to Mali and to the Sahara-Sahel countries in 1994 and 1995, respectively, under the leadership of former Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity William Eteki-Mboumoua, have emphasized both the importance of micro-disarmament as a peace-building tool and the destabilizing effects of cross-border flows of small arms. Every effort should therefore be made by donor countries not only to include disarmament programmes in their development assistance but also to

stem the uncontrolled export of small arms to regions that do not manufacture them.

A fourth finding was that peace and disarmament efforts are at their most effective when a Government shows the political will to address the root causes of conflict, when friendly neighbours offer impartial mediation, and when donor countries and the United Nations provide the necessary assistance. This finding was based on an extensive discussion of Mali's recent history, led and informed by two Ministers from that country who described their Government's determination to involve all segments of the population in the peace process, to recognize the specific development needs of the north, to reintegrate former combatants into civil society, to help resettle refugees and to provide a secure environment conducive to disarmament.

Beyond the case of Mali, there is increasing and welcome evidence that the forces of peace are overcoming those of war in West Africa. In Sierra Leone, in Liberia and in other countries, West Africans are showing their strong commitment to peace, reconciliation and development and deserve the full support of the international community and the United Nations system. In that connection, reference was made by some of the participants to the difficulty of defining the respective responsibilities of the Security Council and the General Assembly in post-conflict peace-building and of apportioning the funding of the related activities between assessed and voluntary contributions. It was suggested that the Council and the Assembly might want to consider ways of clarifying their respective responsibilities in that field so that the United Nations system can provide more readily and more effectively the special type of assistance needed by countries threatened by, or emerging from, armed conflict.

In the belief that this High-level Consultation on Post-conflict Peace-building in West Africa was a useful initiative, I shall consider organizing similar consultations on other regions whose specific development and security conditions could benefit from this kind of attention of the international community.

I should be grateful if you could bring this information to the attention of the members of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

(Signed) Boutros BOUTROS-GHALI